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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR S/CT, DS, SA, P, C, S/P, R, AND PA

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PBTS](#) [KCRM](#) [ASEC](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: INDIANS WORRIED ABOUT NEW TERROR BLASTS AND LASHKAR INSIGHTS

REF: NEW DELHI 8680

Classified By: A/Political Minister Counselor Atul Keshap for Reasons 1 .4 (B, D)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. In a disturbing up-tick in the level of terrorist violence in India, a car bomb blast in Srinagar on November 16 killed four and injured 56, including a former insurgent who changed sides and served for a period as a Kashmiri state minister. This was the third such deadly terrorist incident in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in forty-eight hours; in two other incidents, a former Kashmiri tourism minister almost lost his life in a grenade attack that killed six and wounded 58, while terrorists' gunfire in Lal Chowk market in Srinagar killed two police and two civilians and injured 60 others, including a Japanese freelance cameraman. Heightening Indians' intense anxiety after the October 29 Diwali attacks in Delhi, J&K police for the first time arrested alive a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) suicide squad member whom they claim infiltrated from Pakistan 21 days ago and took part in the Lal Chowk shootout. Meanwhile, the Embassy has received sensitive new revelations from Indian sources indicating the LeT's Diwali bombers received money from the UAE and Saudi Arabia, accentuating the group's evolving trans-national characteristics. In addition, J&K police sources tell us the LeT is working to establish terror cells in Chandigarh, Agra, Maharashtra, and Delhi in part because the world press is inured to attacks in Kashmir. One Kashmiri politician speculated terrorists seek to polarize India's Muslims and Hindus by expanding their operations outside Kashmir. Indians are increasingly nervous about the rising tide of terror and its impact on India's sense of security. ACTION REQUEST: A strong USG message of solidarity emanating from Washington would be a welcome morale-booster that could keep Indian policies we wish to sustain moving in the right direction; please see a suggested draft below in paragraph ten. END SUMMARY.

A DAILY DIET OF DEATH TURNS KASHMIRIS AGAINST TERROR

¶2. (C) Even for a country regularly afflicted by terror for the past fifteen years, the last few days have been unusually eventful. Coming on the heels of the Diwali/Eid massacre on October 29, three attacks in the Kashmir valley in just 48 hours have killed 14 and injured almost 200. Even for Kashmiris, it was a bit too much. Reporters we spoke to in Srinagar said women beat their breasts, tugged their hair, and ululated in traditional signs of mourning as they saw the bodies being removed from the car bomb site outside the front gates of the J&K Bank on November 16. The shootout November 14/15 in Lal Chowk meant that the entire commercial heart of what is nowadays a crowded and prosperous city was under siege for 24 hours as police flushed out terrorists, killing one and capturing one alive for the first time. The grenade attack in Tangmarg decimated a small village community. Two former ministers almost lost their lives on two consecutive days. This followed terrorists' successful assassination of a sitting J&K minister on October 18.

¶3. (C) When news of the latest bombing reached a November 16 conference we attended in Delhi, separatist Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, National Conference leader and MP Omar Abdullah, and PDP leader and MP Mehbooba Mufti unanimously condemned the atrocity, explaining that Kashmiris are dedicated to a peaceful settlement to their problems. The Mirwaiz, whose own uncle was killed by terrorists, commented it was harder and far more dangerous to be a moderate in favor of constructive dialogue than an extremist. Omar Abdullah observed that Kashmiris' mood had changed; he cited as proof the recent fizzled anniversary of the day Indian troops entered J&K for the first time in 1947; past years' observances had been well-attended and feisty. All agreed that terrorism was not the answer, and that peaceful dialogue was the surest path to a just and lasting political settlement.

BUT TERROR INCREASINGLY FOCUSES ON INDIA

¶4. (C) Compounding Indians' concerns about the steady drip-drip of terrorism, newspaper revelations about Kashmiri businessman and LeT member Tariq Dar, whom police allege

helped organize the Diwali blasts (reftel) and additional police claims that they had captured alive -- for the first time in J&K -- a man whom they claim was a suicide-bent terrorist involved in the Lal Chowk shootout led Indians to confront the "face" of murder and terror. The businessman was a salesman for a multi-national corporation; pictures showed him receiving awards for meeting sales goals. He looked like a normal fellow, yet, if police claims hold true in court, he worked to kill 71 people. Lal Chowk detainee Ajaz Ahmad Bhat (aka Abu Sunania) is only 20; he looks like somebody's clean-cut son. Police allege he is from Mansooria (Faisalabad district) in Pakistan, that the LeT infiltrated him 21 days ago, and that he told them calmly he was ready to die for the cause. Police hope he will give them insight into LeT tactics and training for suicide operatives.

15. (S) Senior Kashmiri police officer Javed Makdoumi told us November 7 that humint and sigint received by his office indicated that the LeT is actively recruiting members who look and speak like north Indians. His staff had arrested a Kashmiri man involved in the killing of an Indian railway engineer in 2004 whom Makdoumi felt could easily have passed for a Punjabi. The man told them LeT had sent him to Chandigarh to establish a terror cell at a university. Makdoumi also claimed the man said LeT had established itself in Delhi, Agra, and Maharashtra in addition to Chandigarh. Makdoumi said police worry that Indian cities outside of Kashmir will face a wave of terror along the lines of the Diwali bombings.

TERRORISTS SEEKING ATTENTION, RELIGIOUS POLARIZATION

16. (S) Makdoumi also commented that the LeT had become more media savvy. In the past, their attacks had been throughout the valley of Kashmir. They realized that their media coverage was better when attacks occurred near the major media outlets, all of whom are clustered in a compound in downtown Srinagar. Thereafter, "90 percent" of attacks occurred within four kilometers of the media compound, resulting in almost immediate televised coverage throughout India. Makdoumi claimed the LeT was shifting into the rest of India because Srinagar attacks rarely made much news outside India anymore, whereas blasts in Delhi successfully grabbed the whole world's attention. Omar Abdullah, speaking at a conference on November 16, posited the LeT seeks to spread its operations throughout India in an effort to polarize Hindus and Muslims in the rest of India, even though, he claimed, not one non-Kashmiri Muslim Indian had ever been arrested for joining the jihadis' efforts in Kashmir.

WHILE LeT'S TRANSNATIONAL TIES STRETCH FURTHER AFIELD

17. (S) We followed up on media reports (reftel) that the Diwali bomber Tariq Dar received money from an unnamed Arabian Peninsula country. Noted terrorism expert Ajai Sahni (STRICTLY PROTECT) told us November 16 that five separate wire transfers are on record, all from the UAE. The largest of these was over 1.4 million rupees, while the remaining four totaled 800,000 Rupees, for a total value of approx. USD 49,000. Sahni said police are checking on the source accounts. Even more interestingly, Sahni reported that Dar had been arrested in April 2005 when he returned from the Haj carrying 860,000 Rupees in Saudi Riyals (approx. USD 19,000). Dar told the court then that business associates had given him the money to "invest in India," and was let go, although surveilled for a while at a low priority level, then neglected. Sahni commented that unless strong linkages to specific expenditure in a terrorist operation, or corroborated flows to identified terrorists are identified, money smugglers usually get away on such charges with a financial penalty and no jail time. Sahni lamented that establishing "terror finance" is extremely cumbersome and difficult under current Indian law. NOTE: The UAE connection is being kept very, very quiet by the police and media here, likely to avoid embarrassing the UAEG and to elicit its help.
END NOTE.

AND CAPABILITIES STRENGTHEN?

18. (S) Indians are also increasingly worried about widely-read (and widely-believed) news reports here that allege the LeT has assumed a prominent role in earthquake relief in Pakistan. Prominent Kashmiri separatist Yasin Malik told us he had personally seen USG relief supplies being distributed by jihadis. Malik said the LeT had taken on a vigorous new role in providing people in the quake-affected region necessary supplies. MPs Anand Sharma (Congress party spokesman) and AR Shaheen (J&K) told us November 16 that they were quite worried about the dilution of the Pakistani army's role in earthquake relief. Terrorism and security analysts at www.satp.org also issued an analysis called, "The State fails, the Jihadis Prevail" which has been

amplified in various strategic circles here.

AMERICA CAN REASSURE A WORRIED GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE

19. (C) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: The net effect of the daily news of fresh terrorist attacks combined with revelations of the intricacy and success of terrorist groups has made people here nervous. Following the PM's warnings at SAARC in Dhaka to Pakistan and Bangladesh (reftel), some in the media said the Indo-Pak peace process might have started to cool. For now, the GOI seems set to continue on a steady course of engagement with Pakistan; relief diplomacy at the five new LoC openings and the PM's trade proposals in Dhaka serve as examples of that steadiness. Indians are trying hard not to let the growing death toll from terrorism distract them. Many Indians do not want to play into terrorists hands by disrupting hard-won progress. Given the disturbing increase in the daily level of violence, the USG can play a helpful role in ensuring India keeps moving in the right direction. A clear and unambiguous USG message would be a useful morale-booster that could reassure Indians that their current support for rapprochement with Pakistan and dialogue with Kashmiris, as well as rejection of terrorists' crude attempts to polarize the nation on religious grounds, are the right way to go. Following the car bombing in Srinagar, Washington may wish to consider issuance of a clear statement along the lines of the draft in paragraph ten below. END COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST.

SUGGESTED USG STATEMENT

10. (SBU) The United States condemns in the strongest possible manner the brutal, cruel, and senseless terrorist attack that occurred today in downtown Srinagar near the corporate headquarters of the Jammu and Kashmir Bank.

As we have said repeatedly, there can be no justification for such acts of violence, which have inflicted such harm on the people of Jammu and Kashmir and many other parts of India. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have manifested their wish -- through meaningful participation in elections and on-going dialogue by all segments of government and society -- for a peaceful outcome of their difficulties that establishes a lasting peace and prosperity. In doing so, they have defied the wishes of a tiny minority that continues to wage a bloody and increasingly meaningless campaign to sow discord and intolerance.

The United States adds its voice to that of the vast majority of moderate and peace-loving Kashmiris who have condemned violence, and expresses its dismay at the cruelty of terrorists who attack the Kashmiri people on an almost-daily basis.

We offer our sympathy to the victims of this and other terrorist attacks that have occurred in India, and will endeavor to work with the government of India to help ensure that the terrorists are brought to justice.

The United States remains committed to the permanent end of terrorism against India, which has resulted in so much needless and unjustifiable loss of innocent life.

END TEXT OF SUGGESTED USG STATEMENT.
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